

*Between Death and Resurrection: A Critical Response to Recent Catholic Debate Concerning the Intermediate State*, by Stephen Yates. Bloomsbury, 2017. Pp. v + 271. \$130.00 (hardcover), \$39.95 (paperback).

KEVIN W. SHARPE, St. Cloud State University

"This book constitutes an examination of, and a contribution to, a discussion conducted within the Catholic theological community since the 1960s concerning the proper understanding of the apparent interval between the death of individual human beings and the final consummation of all created things (typically referred to as the 'intermediate state')" (1). So begins Stephen Yates's defense of the traditional Roman Catholic view of the intermediate state and critical analysis of rival views that focus on immediate resurrection. I'm not aware of any other book-length treatment of the intermediate state and immediate resurrection that draws on Catholic and Protestant theological and philosophical traditions with such equal ease. Yates's book is insightful and wonderfully honest, making clear just how difficult it is to hold to the traditional view, while also developing promising avenues of response. Regardless of whether one agrees with Yates's judgment in particular cases (I often did not) or the overall position he reaches (I do not), philosophers and theologians of both Catholic and Protestant orientations will benefit from this patient and detailed critical study.

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the traditional Catholic view of the intermediate state, what Yates calls "the traditional schema," as well as its two main nontraditional rivals. According to the traditional schema, immediately upon death one's soul is ushered into the presence of God, where the person is judged and either rewarded with entrance to heaven (either immediately or after purification in Purgatory) or punished with condemnation to hell, and—regardless of one's eternal destiny—one is reunited with his or her body in the general resurrection at Christ's Parousia (1–2). As this very brief summary makes clear, the traditional schema involves several central commitments, including commitments to a two-staged eschatology, wherein souls are immediately judged after death and their bodies are raised in the general resurrection, and a dualistic personal ontology that permits separated souls (*animae separatae*). It also assumes that human persons persist through death into the intermediate state and that the resurrected body is numerically identical to the living pre-mortem body that perishes (2–3).

For a variety of philosophical and theological reasons, the traditional schema has come under increasing fire from Catholic philosophers and theologians. Not only is it arguably inconsistent with the theological



anthropology of sacred scripture, which seems decidedly monistic, it also threatens to undermine the substantial unity of human persons and is in tension with the centrality of bodily resurrection in the eschatological vision of the Church (6). Motivated by worries such as these, some Catholic theologians have explored one or another version of the immediate resurrection hypothesis (what Yates typically refers to as “resurrection in death”). According to the first of these, *atemporalism*, at death human persons pass “‘from time into a timeless eternity, in which the resurrection has already taken place.’ Death, in other words, leads into the Parousia and the last day” (8). On the other hand, for *nonatemporalism*, the second version of immediate resurrection Yates considers, at death human persons are immediately resurrected into the intermediate state where, as fully embodied persons, they are judged and then rewarded or punished, and await the general resurrection (8), where the general resurrection is here understood as transforming an embodied individual in a way that completes or enhances her bodily existence (13).

Yates’s analysis of the current state of the debate reveals numerous dialectical lacunae around which he structures the remaining chapters. In so doing, he seeks to move the debate forward and in this he is largely successful (I say this as a still unrepentant opponent of the traditional schema). In chapter 2, Yates examines the scriptural evidence for and against the traditional schema. In chapters 3 and 4, Yates carefully examines and critiques atemporalism and nonatemporalism, respectively, and, finally, in chapter 5, Yates offers a comprehensive defense of the traditional schema.

Chapter 2 begins with John Cooper’s now standard distinctions between holistic and monistic anthropologies and two forms of holism, functional and ontological (34). Following Cooper, Yates argues that sacred scripture testifies to a dualistic form of functional holism, and not monism, focusing first on Hebrew Scripture (Old Testament), then on the Deutero and non-canonical literature of the Second Temple period, and finally on the New Testament literature. To those familiar with the exegetical arguments developed by Cooper, G. E. Ladd, and Robert Gundry, there is little here that will surprise the reader. The real highlight of this chapter is Yates’s very close examination of 2 Corinthians 5: 1–10, a text often used by proponents of immediate resurrection to co-opt Paul as an ally. While such folks may not be wholly convinced by Yates’s exegesis, they cannot ignore this important contribution to the debate.

I have two concerns with this chapter that go beyond mere quibbles and exegetical disagreement. Yates seems to assume that the Hebrew scriptures (as well as the later Jewish and New Testament texts) speak with a single voice on matters of theological anthropology. Yet given the remarkable diversity of thought and seemingly irreconcilable points of view preserved in the Hebrew Bible on numerous issues central to Israelite (and, later, to Judean) religious life, practice, and theology, it would be surprising were it to convey a single, unified eschatological vision of personal and collective destiny. Second, for far too long, Christians (myself

included) have relied almost exclusively on the same narrow range of Protestant biblical scholarship on the anthropological and eschatological views of the Hebrew Bible and early Judaism. This narrow exclusivity comes at the cost of marginalizing the amazing work being done by Jewish biblical scholars on these issues. Failing to include Jewish scholars in discussions regarding their sacred scripture and early theological views is no less problematic than convening an all-male panel to explain women's views on their own healthcare. To rectify this problem one could do worse than by starting with Jon Levenson's *Resurrection and the Restoration of Israel* (Yale University Press, 2006).

Yates turns to an examination of atemporalism in chapter 3. According to this version of the immediate resurrection hypothesis, at death, human persons are immediately resurrected into the atemporal reality of the last day, "a timeless eternity which is beyond yet adjacent to time and in which Parousia, resurrection, last judgment, and cosmic consummation coincide" (88). Drawing on both philosophical and theological considerations, Yates convincingly argues (to my mind, at least) that atemporalism offers an inadequate account of the intermediate state. Atemporalism is found to be problematic on philosophical grounds owing to, among other things, our having an essentially temporal nature that is inconsistent with being numerically identical to a person resurrected into atemporal reality. Theologically, atemporalism does no better as it threatens to undermine the eschatological significance of history, denying, as it does, that history culminates in the Parousia. Further, atemporalism stands in serious tension with Catholic faith and practice regarding those in Purgatory, for if at death a person immediately enters into the general resurrection on the last day, then there seems to be little logical or temporal space for the penal purification of Purgatory taught by the Magisterium and presupposed by the Church's practices.

An especially delightful aspect of Yates's discussion in this chapter is his examination of the metaphysical commitments of the Church's practices and rituals. In drawing on the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's declaration that "The Church excludes every way of thinking or speaking that would make meaningless or unintelligible her prayers, her funeral rites and the religious acts offered for the dead" (114), Yates's approach opens exciting new avenues of exploration that may offer us a way forward after what has too often felt like years of stagnation in intractable debates. Just as positions in personal ontology can be usefully evaluated in light of their implications for philosophical theology (for example, whether a materialist conception of human persons is consistent with the incarnation of the Son), so they may also be usefully evaluated in light of their implications for religious practices (for example, whether the Church's practice of praying for the deceased necessitates a dualist conception of human persons).

Having found atemporalism inadequate, Yates turns, in chapter 4, to nonatemporalism, according to which at death human persons are

immediately resurrected into the intermediate state, from which temporal vantage point the consummation of all things on the Last Day is still yet to come (8). The nonatemporalist's insistence on an embodied existence in the intermediate state raises the issue of how to adequately account for the numerical identity of the person whose corpse lies before us and the person who has risen into the intermediate state (127, 131–134). Chapter 4 carefully examines the leading proposals from John Hick, R. T. Herbert, Charles Hartshorne, Hans Kung, Peter van Inwagen, Karl Rahner, and others, ultimately finding each of them unsatisfactory. The scope of analysis in this chapter is impressive, the arguments are often compelling, and it nicely summarizes for Catholic philosophers and theologians an area of debate that's too often dominated by their Protestant siblings.

With that said, I was left disappointed. Throughout this chapter, Yates relies heavily (though certainly not exclusively) on William Hasker's discussion in *The Emergent Self*, and this is especially true of his discussion of Dean Zimmerman and Kevin Corcoran's "fissioning" model of resurrection, according to which at death the human body undergoes fission in virtue of the particles composing it coming to stand in immanent causal relations with two successive sets of particles, one of which compose a terrestrial corpse and the other of which compose a living body in the intermediate state (163). Hasker objects to this model of resurrection on the grounds that it entails a closest-continuer account of personal identity and closest-continuer accounts of personal identity are, he argues, inconsistent with the necessity of identity, a cost that all parties would deem unacceptably high. The problem is that both Zimmerman and Corcoran have provided detailed responses to Hasker that are not so much as mentioned by Yates, much less critically engaged. Granted, one may not like what Zimmerman and Corcoran say in response to Hasker, but in a book so centrally structured around addressing dialectical lacunae, some of which are a matter of one side's failing to address an objection or failing to address a reply to an objection made by the other side, it was disappointing to see the author merely repeat Hasker's criticism with no further consideration of the matter. I have related worries regarding Yates's discussion of the relation between spatiotemporal continuity and the persistence of ordinary material objects (e.g., 139), but space precludes pursuing them here.

The inadequacy of immediate resurrection sets up Yates's claim in chapter 5 that only a personal ontology including separated souls is able to ground both a person's continued existence in the intermediate state and the numerical identity of her living, pre-mortem body and her resurrection body (213). The main burden of the chapter is to address a cornucopia of objections to the traditional schema and here the book really shines. This is easily the strongest (as well as the longest) chapter of the book. In the first half, Yates addresses challenges to the traditional schema based on the seeming incoherence of a separated soul, the problem of individuating separated souls, accounting for the possibility of a separated soul's cognitive activity, and the trouble with securing a role for the separated

soul in personal identity. For the sake of space, I'll focus on the last of these issues. Yates argues that the persistence of a separated soul is able to ground personal identity through death, disembodiment in the intermediate state, and resurrection by drawing on a notion of partial existence that allows him to deny that existence is "all or nothing" (201 ff.). Such a view, he argues, opens up the possibility of holding that while only a part of the person survives her death, it follows neither that the person ceases to exist *full stop* nor that the person experiences a break in continuity that would threaten the identification of the resurrected person with the person who died.

This section of the chapter not only goes a long way toward resolving the tension between a Thomistic anthropology and human persistence through death and resurrection, it also presents an original and important contribution to the dispute between survivalists and corruptionists and ought to be carefully considered by all parties to that debate. I only wish that Yates had engaged a wider range of scholars currently working on these issues. With a few exceptions (for example, Robert Pasnau, with whom Yates extensively interacts), Yates tends to engage only scholarship that's at least twenty years old. Yes, there are passing references to more recent work (Patrick Toner, Eleonore Stump, and John Madden are three examples), but many scholars who've made central contributions to the debate over Thomistic anthropology and post-mortem survival are entirely ignored. Certainly, as Yates notes (213), one cannot consider everything written on a given topic, but in what may well be a golden age of Thomistic scholarship, one would expect greater interaction with recent work. This is especially true with regard to Jeffrey Brower, David Oderberg, and Eleonore Stump, all of whom have offered philosophically sophisticated discussions connecting mereological considerations (of the sort relevant for Yates's discussion) and disembodied survival.

In the second half of the chapter, Yates addresses a tension between the ontologically incomplete nature of the separated soul that experiences the beatific vision and the centrality of the resurrection of the body to Catholic eschatology (215). In affirming that the separated soul experiences the beatific vision, it seems to follow that it experiences perfect beatitude (understood as perfectly complete joy or bliss) and, since perfect beatitude entails the satisfaction of all desires, it seems to follow that any increase in quantity or intensity of beatitude is impossible for separated souls experiencing the beatific vision (235). The problem is that this conjunction of views is seemingly incompatible with the ontologically incomplete nature of the separated soul, for which union with its body would increase beatitude in some way.

To resolve this tension, Yates distinguishes between subjective and objective beatitude, the former being understood as a subjective experience of joy or bliss and the latter in terms of the glorification of the holy individual. This distinction enables Yates to accept the claim that being the subject of the beatific vision entails experiencing perfect beatitude,

understood subjectively, while rejecting that claim when understood objectively. Subjectively, a subject of the beatific vision cannot experience any increase or augmentation of beatitude; objectively, on the other hand, the subject's beatitude (now understood as glory) can be increased through union with its body (236). I found this solution compelling and elegant, especially regarding its fit with the Church's grand eschatological vision of the restoration and glorification of all creation on the Last Day.

Despite some minor weakness (some I've mentioned, others I've not), Stephen Yates has given readers a delightful and often compelling defense of the traditional Catholic view of the intermediate state and critique of its rivals. Any scholar working on these issues, Catholic or Protestant, should have *Between Death and Resurrection* on their shelf.